

Birmingham City Council

City Council

7 February 2023



Subject: Scrutiny Business Report

Report of: Cllr. Sir Albert Bore, Chair of Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If relevant, state which appendix is exempt, and provide exempt information paragraph number or reason if confidential: N/A

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the work programme across all Overview & Scrutiny Committees during November 2022- January 2023 and highlights the current progress on the four Inquiries referred to in the previous Scrutiny Business report. Also outlined is the outcome from the review of the recommendations from the Customer Services programme by the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the next steps for this work.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the report be noted.

3 Background

- 3.1 The [statutory guidance for local government overview and scrutiny](#) sets out the role it can play in holding an authority's decision makers to account. This makes it fundamentally important to the successful functioning of local democracy. Effective Overview and Scrutiny should:
- Provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge

- Amplify the voices and concerns of the public
- Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- Drive improvements in public services

4 Customer Services Programme

Customer Services

- 4.1 A Task and Finish Group of Members from Co-ordinating Overview & Scrutiny Committee has considered the outcomes of the first phase of the Customer Services Programme focusing on 'Fixing the Basics', as originally set out in the Customer Services Strategy and associated Enhanced Business Case (EBC) approved by Cabinet in December 2021.
- 4.2 The Task and Finish Group has met with the service area sponsors/leads from Bereavement Services, Housing Repairs, Waste Management and Highways to consider the recommended opportunities arising from the Customer Service Programme's initial user research on improving customer experience and increasing customer satisfaction.
- 4.3 The Task and Finish Group reported to Co-ordinating Overview & Scrutiny Committee in December and January on the recommendations relating to the four service areas. The Committee has also supported the implementation of the Customer Services Programme Phase 2 as outlined in the [December 2022 Cabinet report](#).
- 4.4 Appendix A provides the amended recommendations across these four service areas as presented to Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 January.

Bereavement Services

- 4.5 The Task and Finish Group reviewed all recommendations on 24 November. Appendix A outlines the further comments and recommendations that have been taken on board by the Assistant Director, Regulation and Enforcement.
- 4.6 Workshops have commenced with the Customer Services team and the service leads to prioritise the recommendations and create a service improvement plan and roadmap. This clearly defines delivery accountability with the items within scope of the programme added to the Customer Service Programme Phase 2. Specific examples include but are not limited to:
 - Clear online guidance and published: 'What to do if someone dies'. Booklet awaiting sign off. From April 2023, a medical examiner will authorise all Medical Certificates of Cause of Death.
 - Provide clear guidelines for relatives on their responsibility for maintaining a grave and promote existing grave maintenance service.

- Offer a partial back fill/partial manual fill of a grave for relatives after the burial where the access and resources are available.
- A new bereavement system that has the capability to provide funeral directors with a view of all current bookings with the council and updates, without having to make manual checks.
- Appointment of a Head of Services for both Bereavement and Registrars to enable better sharing of information between the services and other partners.
- Review the current process and timelines of putting a headstone on a grave. Service is raising invoices via Oracle. Investigate option for online payment at point of request for service.
- Review all signage to make sites easier to navigate around and to improve the customer experience.
- Sutton New Hall Cemetery provides an out of hours emergency burial service. Investigate demand for other sites to establish out of hours provision to enable Muslim burials to proceed at pace across the whole of Birmingham.
- Reduction of long-term agency staff and backfill of current vacancies.
- One published service phone contact number and mailbox, with the customer contact centre helping to log, triage, track and report all enquiries received.
- Review additional income generation opportunities, for example: core service fees; package options for additional services such as maintenance or borders for graves

Housing Repairs

- 4.7 The Task and Finish Group reviewed all recommendations on 29 November. Appendix A outlines further comments and recommendations that have been taken on board by the Head of Service, Housing Management.
- 4.8 The Task and Finish Group commended the on-going work within the service and the efforts being undertaken to improve the customer experience and satisfaction, but emphasised the critical aspect of the following improvements for there to be a transformational change to the service:
- Introduction of a new reporting process to enable customers to report, diagnose and track a repair.
 - Adoption of a new KPI 'right first time' that reduces the need for repeated contact on the same repair.
 - Review of tenancy conditions with communication materials detailing expectation of both the Council and the tenant, and with a more flexible approach to the start day/end day of a tenancy.

- Introduction of a 2-way functionality for contractors and customers on communications over repair appointments, prior to and on the day of the appointment.
- More effective working with contractors on sharing data and systems to improve effectiveness and the customer experience.
- Choice-based lettings – meaningful guidance is required for customers which aligns to the customer journey, as the 'as is' not providing the information customers require at the time they need, and which manages expectations and timelines.
- The website states there is high demand for housing within Birmingham but does not give any example or average waiting times based on typical applications. Providing this information would be useful to customers. Members to obtain regular updates via <https://www.birminghamchoice.co.uk/> with a cascaded link on the Members Page that contains an Average Waiting Time calculator to check the supply and demand of properties per area; and live updates on property availability.

Waste Management

- 4.9 The Task and Finish Group reviewed all recommendations on 5 December. Appendix A outlines further comments and recommendations that have been taken on board by the Assistant Director, Street Scene.
- 4.10 The Task & Finish Group concluded that a transformational change in the service was possible if key recommendations were implemented, including:
- Appointment of a new Transformational Director who will ensure that the technology (KIT – Knew in-cab Technology) is in place and fully operational by the end of December 2022, and with a staff training programme which is fully supported by the Trade Unions – with all round data up to-date, the technology able to flag assisted collections to avoid them being missed, with crews mandated to report issues such as locations of broken bins and trigger a repair or replacement bin or to report contaminated waste recycling bins, with daily collections monitored by the managers of the service.
 - Use of the KIT to ensure the reduction of missed collections - the KIT will enable real time reporting of missed collections, whatever the reason, and the data captured and held in a single system so the Contact Centre will have visibility in the event of customer contact.
 - Managers to follow up on multi-service issues causing repeated missed collection, such as parking breaches or skips on the highway, and in real-time – if a vehicle breaks down and cannot complete a round - allocate the work to other crews who may have the capacity on the same day, with processes agreed by the Trade Unions.

- Recruitment process to fill all permanent vacancies, retaining 23% of agency cover for sickness, annual leave, and other similar commitments. In the event of planned vehicle maintenance, alternative vehicles to be sourced in advance but, if not possible, the work re-allocated to other crews with capacity.
- As the KIT will enhance complaint responses, with more personalised responses, a reduction in complaint volumes to allow efficiencies in administrative activities to be made.
- Review current guidance for how the public should correctly recycle, working with Keep Britain Tidy to find a way of telling residents they have done something wrong.
- As it is mandatory for crews to pick up any dropped refuse or spillage at the point of collection when being lifted into the collection vehicle, depot managers to monitor and performance manage.

Highways

4.11 The Task and Finish Group reviewed all recommendations on 12 December. Appendix A outlines further comments and recommendations that have been taken on board by the Assistant Director for Inclusive Growth and other service representatives, including:

- The response to complaints from contractors is not always to an acceptable quality. Some quality improvements require process and/or system changes with BHL/Kier. The PFI contract will be to lever for alignment.
- Members were being requested to submit enquiries through a form created by Highways. Use of the complaints teams is the corporate approach but as most enquiries are not complaints, a better route is needed to process enquiries that are not complaints.
- Two business support teams managing service enquiries and complaints, working in silos. Consolidate into one team, redirecting freed up resource elsewhere in the service.
- Service finding it difficult to prioritise activity because sometimes everything is considered urgent. The service to define what should be classified as urgent and members to identify cases that are urgent based on their community knowledge, with possible use of transportation capital budget for some priorities.
- Resolve confusion and problems arising from Clean Air Zone (CAZ) and other highways/parking penalty charge notices being dealt with in two different directorates - Highways for non-payment of PCNs and CAZ team communications and messaging about the CAZ charge and how to pay - with no customer data transfer between the two teams.

- Improve the current reporting options for customers using new technological solutions becoming available to automate the process.
- Take up opportunities for sharing information online/offline with customers on why something has happened or why a decision has been made.

Next Steps

- 4.12 The intention of the Committee is to follow up with measures to ensure that the identified end-to-end customer service improvements are implemented. Furthermore, in a second phase of the work the Task and Finish Group will be scrutinising how service area senior managers are responding to feedback from the Customer Services workshops to embed the Customer Service strategy. Transformational change, particularly in Housing Repairs and Waste Management, could be realised if the recommendations are put into practice.

5 In-depth Scrutiny

- 5.1 In depth scrutiny enables Members to consider complex issues and make recommendations which could deliver improvements in public services. The Inquiries use a traditional task and finish model where a complex topic is explored in significant detail over a longer period of time. However, Overview and Scrutiny Committees have also been able to take forward a short, sharp review approach for the review of the Customer Services programme, the development of the new Domestic Abuse strategy and Cleaner Streets. In particular with Customer Services and Domestic Abuse, these reviews have been possible as they have been delivered in a different way. In an innovative approach, other Council services have offered their support to facilitate these reviews.
- 5.2 There are four Inquiries progressing at this time, all of which are in the Call for Evidence stage. They receive evidence from a wide range of sources including Cabinet Members, relevant Council services, partner organisations, service users and other members of the public.
- 5.3 **Child Criminal Exploitation:** The Terms of Reference was approved by the Education and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 30 November. The key question for this Inquiry is: 'How are the Council and Partners working together to reduce the risks of Criminal Exploitation for young people?' A Call for Evidence to Members was launched in January. This will be followed by a Call for Evidence to stakeholder organisations and families, which is intended to launch in February. The Task and Finish Group has worked with the Public Participation team to develop this Call for Evidence.
- 5.4 **Children and Young People's Mental Health:** The Inquiry has received evidence to date from Birmingham Educational Psychology Service; Birmingham Education Partnership; West Midlands Ambulance Service; West Midlands Police; Birmingham City Council Approved Mental Health Professional Service. All Members will be invited by the Chair of the Inquiry to input into the inquiry; a Call for Evidence to the

public has also been launched. This Inquiry is led by the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a joint inquiry with Education and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- 5.5 **Commonwealth Games Legacy, Promoting Health and Wellbeing:** The Inquiry has received evidence to date from the Cabinet Member; the Birmingham City Council's Sport and Physical Activity service, and Sport Birmingham. On January 25, the Task and Finish Group visited Alexander Stadium as part of its evidence gathering. A Call for Evidence from the public closed on 13 January. This Inquiry is led by the Commonwealth Games, Culture and Physical Activity Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a joint inquiry with Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 5.6 **Employment and Skills for Young People:** The Inquiry has received evidence from University College Birmingham; University of Birmingham; Birmingham Education Partnership; Birmingham Children's Trust; Birmingham City Council Youth Service; and Birmingham City University (this has included a visit on 20 January to the STEAMhouse). Members of the Task and Finish Group have also met with young people at the Factory Young People's Centre in Longbridge to seek their views. All Members have been invited by the Chair of the Inquiry to input into the inquiry; a Call for Evidence to the public has also been launched. This Inquiry is led by the Economy and Skills Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

6 Summary of Committee Work Programmes

- 6.1 Further to the Inquiries outlined above, the individual Committees have also considered a wide range of other topics.

Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 6.2 The Committee has reviewed the implementation of the recommendations of the Exempt Accommodation Inquiry and related planning enforcement issues.
- 6.3 The Committee has also received an update on the Early Intervention and Prevention programme and the proposal to develop an early intervention and prevention directorate.
- 6.4 Following the resolution at City Council on 6 December on the Homes for Ukraine Programme, the Committee has considered a summary of feedback from host families, and a report on the Council contracts that support the Homes for Ukraine programme. The Cabinet member for Social Justice, Community Safety and Equalities has also attended to report on his Cabinet portfolio priorities and update the Committee on the Everyone's Battle, Everyone's Business Action Plan and the Cost-of-Living Crisis Programme.
- 6.5 The Committee has undertaken a Roundtable event to review the [Birmingham Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy 2018-2023](#). The purpose of this event was to inform the development of the new strategy, and this will be further considered at a single-issue meeting on 17 February. This is an example where Members are

exploring a complex issue using a short, sharp review approach and furthermore, being led by Adult and Social Care.

Commonwealth Games, Culture and Physical Activity Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 6.6 The Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care attended in December 2022 to present on her cabinet portfolio priorities.
- 6.7 The Committee has dedicated the January formal meeting to evidence gathering for its inquiry.

Economy and Skills Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 6.8 The Committee dedicated both December and January formal meetings to evidence gathering for its Inquiry. This has been supplemented by additional evidence gathering sessions by the smaller Inquiry Task and Finish group.

Education and Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 6.9 The Committee has considered the Children and Families Directorate Improvement Plan and the Children's Partnership Change for Children 2023-2028 Plan. The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families was in attendance.
- 6.10 The Committee considered an update report and evidence for the Child Criminal Exploitation Inquiry, and the Young People's Mental Health Inquiry from the Children's Trust at the November 2022 committee meeting. Members of the Children and Young People Mental Health Inquiry from the Health and Social Care O&S Committee were also in attendance. The agenda for the Committee meeting on the 30 November also included consideration of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) This meeting was adjourned and reconvened on 25 January.

Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 6.11 The Independent Chair of the Birmingham Safeguarding Adults Board has presented the annual report on 20 December.
- 6.12 The Committee has considered the Birmingham City Council Adult Social Care performance monitoring report for Q1 and Q2, 2022-23.
- 6.13 The Committee has considered the Birmingham and Lewisham African Health Inequalities Review (BLACHIR) and has been informed on the actions being taken to deliver on its recommendations. The Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care was in attendance.
- 6.14 Evidence gathering for its Inquiry has also been undertaken in the Committee meetings. This has been supplemented by additional evidence gathering sessions by the smaller Inquiry Task and Finish group.

- 6.15 The Birmingham and Solihull Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee met 19 January to consider the allegations reported on BBC Newsnight (December 2022). Representatives from University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust; Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board (ICB) and West Midlands Ambulance Service (WMAS) were in attendance. The ICB has announced three major reviews will be undertaken into University Hospitals Birmingham. The first review has commenced and will focus on the aspects of patient safety raised in the BBC Newsnight programme. Representatives from Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull also attended to seek an endorsement from the committee for four proposed ground rules in relation to these ICB reviews.
- 6.16 This Committee also considered the Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System performance against Finance and Recovery Plans.

Housing and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 6.17 As part of its work on Cleaner Streets, Derby City Council, Rochdale Borough Council and Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council have presented to the Committee. The Committee are developing recommendations to shape new policy around Cleaner Streets for the Cabinet Member for Environment, which can improve the services delivered to citizens. The specific focus for this work has been Street Cleansing, Graffiti and Litter. This is an example where Members are exploring a complex issue using a short, sharp review approach.
- 6.18 The Committee considered a Request for Call-In on the Cabinet decision on Housing Repairs, Maintenance and Investment 2024. The decision was not referred back to Cabinet, however a letter outlining the Committee's concerns has been sent to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources.
- 6.19 The Cabinet Member for Environment has presented to the Committee on the Fly-tipping Inquiry, and specifically the progress undertaken on its recommendations for a camera scheme to address fly-tipping and a review of its prosecution strategy.
- 6.20 The Annual Report of the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership was presented to the Committee in December. This is part of its role as the Crime and Disorder Committee (Police and Justice Act 2006).
- 6.21 The Cabinet Member for Social Justice, Community Safety and Equalities presented his priorities for 2022-23.

Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 6.22 The Committee has continued its scrutiny of the Council's financial position, specifically through consideration of the Month 7 Financial Monitoring Report and has also received the latest reports on Planned Procurement Activities.
- 6.23 Members have attended a training session on 22 December to prepare for the Committee's Budget Scrutiny session on 9 February. This training advised on budget setting and processes. It also provided further information on the role of the

Council to approve the budget, and the specific role of Overview and Scrutiny for budget scrutiny.

Sustainability and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 6.24 The Committee undertook a visit to University Station in December to review the progress made on the building works of the new station. Local ward councillors also joined the visit.
- 6.25 Members have received a report on the tender strategy for the procurement of a new Civil Parking Enforcement service; this contract will be renewed in 2024. The Committee have also considered the revised Footway Crossings Policy.

West Midlands Police and Crime Panel

- 6.26 The Panel has reviewed the Commissioner's Annual Report of the Police and Crime Plan. The Commissioner considered the Panel's recommendations and an updated [final Annual Report](#) has been published.
- 6.27 The Panel has examined the Commissioner's oversight of West Midlands Police to reduce serious violence. This has included a consideration of work with criminal justice and community safety partners. The Panel welcomed representatives of the Violence Reduction Partnership and West Midlands Police who outlined their focus and activities.
- 6.28 The Commissioner has introduced his preliminary budget proposals and proposed policing precept; this is ahead of the formal review of the policing precept for 2022-23 at its 6 February meeting. The public consultation for the budget and policing precept closed on 30 January.
- 6.29 The Panel has continued to focus on key themes arising from its [Public Confidence in Policing inquiry](#), which was published in 2022; on this occasion, the Panel considered Police Visibility and Access. The Panel has received further information on how the Commissioner is providing oversight of West Midlands Police to improve its contact with the public and its call handling performance, and specifically how West Midlands Police's Force Contact Improvement Plan.
- 6.30 The Panel welcomed a public question about how the Panel were scrutinising the Commissioner to 'ensure road danger reduction and deliver a safe and secure road network' and 'prioritise reductions in speeding and nuisance driving'. The Panel intends to undertake further scrutiny on this issue.
- 6.31 The Panel has launched a new website: [West Midlands Police and Crime Panel | Birmingham City Council](#). This provides further information to the public and Members on the work of the Panel, and also provides guidance to the public on how to submit a question to the Panel.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report, however the work and functions of the Council's overview and scrutiny function is prescribed in the Council's constitution.
- 7.2 With specific regard to the Customer Services work, the Council is under a duty under [Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999](#) to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.
- 7.3 Further to this, the Council will carry out this work under the [General Powers of Competence Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011](#).

8 Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no procurement implications or financial implications of the recommendations in this report.
- 8.2 The original Enhanced Business Case for the Customer Services Strategy sought and approved total funding of £1.7m for Year 1 in December 2021. The Customer Service resource profile forecasts budget spend at the identified £ 1.7m costs allocated to the programme in final qtr. of 2021/22 and 2022/23.
- 8.3 The savings that are currently set out in the Medium-Term Financial Plan increase by £600k in 2023/2024. Phase 2 will help to deliver these and also identify future potential savings of over the next 2 years.

9 Public Sector Equality Duty

- 9.1 The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 9.2 All Overview and Scrutiny Committees ensure they address these duties by considering them during work programme development, and specifically the scoping of work, evidence gathering and making recommendations. This has included considering: How policy issues impact on different groups within the community, particularly those that share a relevant protected characteristic; Whether the impact on particular groups is fair and proportionate; Whether there is equality of access to services and fair representation of all groups within Birmingham; Whether any positive opportunities to advance equality of opportunity and/or good relations between people are being realised.
- 9.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committees ensure that equalities comments, and any recommendations, are based on evidence. This should include demographic and

service level data and evidence of residents/service-users views gathered through consultation.

- 9.4 Specifically in relation to the Customer Services work undertaken by the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the implementation of the Customer Service Strategy and therefore the activities of the Task and Finish Group may impact a number of the nine protected characteristics (specifically Age, Disability and Race) with the channel shift to self-serve. However, the vision of the Strategy is clear and will endeavour to ensure a high quality, consistent and efficient approach to the customer journey across all channels by ensuring our customers access the right information at the right time and content is accurate and up to date regardless of the channel.

10 Other Implications

10.1 How are the recommended decisions consistent with the City Council's priorities, plans and strategies?

The work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees contributes towards the Birmingham City Council Corporate Plan 2022-2026, its Grand Challenges and Strategic Priorities and Outcomes.

11 Background Papers

11.1 [Scrutiny Business Report – November 2022](#)

11.2 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes – November – January 2022

11.3 Customer Services Programme Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Update Report – December 2022

11.4 Customer Services Programme Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Update Report – January 2023

12 Appendices

12.1 Appendix A: Customer Services Status Review of Recommendations